

Four or five years ago we started shearing our sheep in the winter. Long, draggy episodes in the spring simply became as expensive and hard on the ewes and lambs that we switched to the uncertainty of pneumonia and blizzards.

Wool, as you may know, has been a lifeless commodity ever since synthetics became so popular. The ever dollar a pound grease prices this spring have been the first spark the market has shown in way over 20 years. Along with the decline in market activity, sheep shearers have become a labor problem slightly in excess of any of the troubles experienced in any four Central American revolutions. For all-out reliability and surliness, the sheep peeler became a world leader.

Other factors such as the total liberation of the wolf packs to roam the sheep ranches and the lobbying by Australians in our government to end wool tariffs at tunes of \$100,000 a year per lobbyist, have made raising woolies a mighty perilous trade. In spite of all this, I have remained a staunch supporter of sheep in the Shortgrass Country, as they have been the reason family and friends have been able to remain here so long. Cattle in these parts have been mere gentle pets that were kept around the feed grounds to give the ranches a western atmosphere.

The business is changing in our favor. Last month I helped shear my stepdad's operation. New income came into the scene. We discovered that this crew of worn-out shearers were drinking and discarding a fortune in aluminum beer cans. At 24 cents a pound for the cans and \$1.16 a pound for staple wool, we were on the edge of a tidy profit from the harvest.

The big payoff came on the days when it was too damp to shear but perfect to drink beer, No grading or sacking expense was necessary; cans are a lot easier to roundup and work than sheep.

I decided right then to go back to shearing in May or maybe June. A fellow up on his luck might hit a crew during a heat wave and flat clean up.

We adjoin a highway for seven miles, Prospecting is competitive, but by raising our fencing on the slopes, the cane would roll in on private property, plus some of the sheep might wander off and be forgotten.

It's the most exciting development that's hit our operation in years. We don't raise a hoof or a horn that'll match that profit/ Next spring I'm going to hire the biggest crew in Texas. I

I've always known that if you'd stay with sheep, they'd stay with you.